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Exploring the Effect of Body Appreciation on the Relationship between Social Networking Site Usage and Body Dissatisfaction

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Exposure to idealized images of individuals in traditional media outlets, such as fashion magazines, has been associated with body dissatisfaction (BD) among men and women (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). While the effects of images from social media on BD have been studied less frequently, a connection between social networking site (SNS) usage and BD for both men and women has been identified (Stronge et al., 2015).

One personal characteristic that seems to counteract the negative influence of traditional media exposure on BD for women is body appreciation (BA) (Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2015). It remains unknown, however, whether a similar link exists between BA and BD with respect to social media for women and men. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact that BA may have on the relationship between SNS usage and BD.

Perloff (2014) created a model for understanding social media's influence on individuals' BD. In his transactional model, Perloff proposes that individual difference variables will have an impact on how people use social media. Exposure to SNSs has been associated with a higher degree of internalization of appearance ideals (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). When people internalize appearance ideals, they will tend to use SNSs to seek out opportunities to provide and receive feedback about appearance, participating in a process referred to as social grooming (Kim & Chock, 2015). When they engage in social grooming on SNSs, like Facebook, individuals will tend to also engage in social comparisons based on appearance (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Social appearance comparisons will tend to lead to BD. However, as past research based on traditional media influence suggests, BA may moderate the relationship between social appearance comparisons and BD in the SNS environment (Andrew et al., 2015). Based on Perloff's model and supporting literature, the following hypotheses were created.

H1: Facebook usage is positively related to internalization of appearance ideals.

H2: Internalization of appearance ideals is positively related to Facebook social grooming.

H3: Facebook social grooming is positively related to social appearance comparison.

H4: Social appearance comparison is positively related to body dissatisfaction.

H5: Body appreciation moderates the relationship between social appearance comparison and body dissatisfaction.

Method

A total of 404 participants (51.5% female, 63.6% Caucasian, mean age of 34.47 years, 42.6% completed a bachelor's degree) completed an online questionnaire that was posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The questionnaire contained seven sections. The first six

sections contained scales with 7-point, Likert-type items that were previously validated and designed to assess the variables in the study. Demographic items were assessed using categorical items in the last section of the questionnaire.

Results

To test the hypotheses, structural equation modeling was employed. The final model displayed a moderate, but acceptable, fit ($\chi^2_{(248)} = 1181.81, p = .00$; GFI = .78; CFI = .90; NFI = .86; TLI = .88; RMSEA = .09) (Bollen & Long, 1993). The path between Facebook usage and internalization of appearance ideals (H1) was positive and significant ($\gamma = .17, t = 3.21, p = .001$). The path between internalization of appearance ideals and Facebook social grooming (H2) was positive and significant ($\beta = .87, t = 9.99, p = .00$). Facebook social grooming was positively and significantly related to social appearance comparison (H3) ($\beta = .86, t = 10.47, p = .00$). The path between social appearance comparison and body dissatisfaction (H4) was positive and significant ($\beta = .21, t = 3.94, p = .00$). Thus, H1 through H4 were supported.

Lastly, H5 was tested by comparing the χ^2 in the constrained model (888.69) and the unconstrained model (742.15) (Awang, 2012). The difference was significant ($p = .02$), supporting H5 and indicating that body appreciation does reduce the effect of social appearance comparison and body dissatisfaction ($\beta = .18, t = 2.33, p = .02$).

Discussion

The results of the present study demonstrate that SNS usage is positively related to BD. Thus, Perloff's (2014) transactional model does seem to be applicable in this context. Furthermore, the effect of social appearance comparison on BD can be reduced if individuals experience BA, supporting previous research (Andrew et al., 2015). Researchers concerned about BD may search for ways to increase BA among both men and women.

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